

OCTOBER 6, 1978

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER: THE GREAT ENTERTAINER
(INSERTS IN TAPF LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

THE 1978 NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE WAS AWARDED TO THE POLISH-BORN, AMERICAN WRITER, ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, FOR WHAT THE SWEDISH ACADEMY OF LETTERS CALLED "HIS IMPASSIONATE NARRATIVE ART, WHICH, WITH ROOTS IN A POLISH-JEWISH CULTURAL TRADITION, BRINGS UNIVERSAL HUMAN CONDITIONS, TO LIFE."

WITH A CLOSE LOOK AT THE MAN AND HIS ART, HERE IS -----
VOICE:

JUST AS IF IT WERE IN ONE OF OWN STORIES, THE IMPROBABLE HAS HAPPENED: ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, THE 74- YEAR-OLD JEWISH STORYTELLER, WHO WRITES IN YIDDISH, AN ALMOST EXTINCT LANGUAGE ABOUT PEOPLE AND PLACES SWEEPED AWAY BY HISTORY, HAS JUST BEEN AWARDED THE 1978 NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE.

IN 50 YEARS OF WRITING, MR. SINGER HAS PRODUCED AN ENORMOUS BODY OF WORK RANGING FROM MEMOIRS, TO NEWSPAPER ARTICLES TO CHILDREN'S BOOKS, NOVELS AND SHORT-STORIES. THE EXACT DIMENSIONS OF HIS WRITINGS ARE STILL UNKNOWN SINCE A GOOD PART OF IT REMAINS UNTRANSLATED. BUT WHAT HAS BEEN TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH, HEBREW, FRENCH, GERMAN, ITALIAN, DUTCH, NORWEGIAN, FINNISH AND JAPANESE, ENJOYS AN ENORMOUS POPULARITY.

"I CAN'T TELL YOU WHY PEOPLE LIKE WHAT I SAY, MR. SINGER IS QUOTED AS SAYING AND ADDING, "THE GUESS IS THAT THERE'S ALWAYS A KINSHIP BETWEEN SOULS."

THE WORLD OF ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER -- NOTES THE SWEDISH ACADEMY OF LETTERS IN ITS CITATION -- IS THE WORLD AND LIFE OF EAST EUROPEAN JEWRY, SUCH AS IT WAS LIVED IN CITIES AND VILLAGES, IN POVERTY AND PERSECUTION, IMBUE WITH SINCERE PIETY AND RITES, COMBINED WITH BLIND FAITH AND SUPERSTITION.

BORN IN 1904, IN THE TOWN OF RADZYMIN, POLAND, THE WRITER CAME TO THE UNITED STATES IN 1935, BUT ONE MAY SAY THAT SPIRITUALLY, HE HAS NEVER ABANDONED THE WORLD OF HIS YOUTH. MR. SINGER HIMSELF PUTS IT THIS WAY:

TAPE: CUT ONE -- SINGER

"I HAVE NEVER PHYSICALLY GONE BACK TO POLAND. BUT IN MY WRITING I GO BACK TO POLAND ALL THE TIME. PEOPLE TELL ME, THESE PEOPLE HAVE PERISHED, THEY DIED, AND I SAY, IN LITERATURE LIKE IN DREAMS DEATH DOES NOT EXIST."

VOICE:

(OPT) ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER WRITES ON A 42 YEARS OLD YIDDISH TYPEWRITER WHICH, HE SAYS, IS VERY CAPRICIOUS AND HIGHLY CRITICAL. HIS STORIES APPEAR FIRST IN THE "JEWISH DAILY FORWARD", A SMALL NEW-YORK YIDDISH-LANGUAGE-PAPER WITH SOME TWENTY THOUSAND READERS. HIS INSISTANCE IN WRITING IN YIDDISH HAS BEEN CALLED BY SOME CRITICS "AN INSPIRED MADNESS". BUT MR. SINGER'S REPLY IS THAT YIDDISH CONTAINS VITAMINS THAT OTHER LANGUAGES DON'T HAVE. IT'S TRUE THAT IT LACKS IN TECHNOLOGICAL TERMS -- SAID THE WRITER DURING A RECENT TELEVISION APPEARANCE, -- BUT IT'S A MARVELOUS LITERARY TOOL:

TAPE: CUT TWO -- SINGER

"IF YOU WANT TO DESCRIBE A JET PLANE OR AN ATOMIC BOMB, YOU WILL HAVE GREAT TROUBLE IF YOU'D HAPPEN TO WRITE IN YIDDISH. BUT IF YOU FEEL LIKE DESCRIBING A POOR MAN, OR A MISER, OR AN IDIOT, YOU WILL FIND MORE SYNONYMS IN YIDDISH THAN IN ANY OTHER LANGUAGE." (LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE) (END OPT)

VOICE:

ACCORDING TO MR. SINGER, WHEN HE SITS DOWN TO WRITE A STORY HE IS INTERESTED IN WHAT EVERYBODY IS INTERESTED IN: IN LOVE AND IN TREACHERY, IN HOPES AND IN DISAPPOINTMENTS. BUT SINCE HE KNOWS THE JEWISH PEOPLE BEST AND SINCE HE KNOWS THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE BEST, HIS HEROES ARE ALWAYS JEWISH AND SPEAK YIDDISH.

AS A WRITER, ISAAC BESHEVIS SINGER IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT CURRENT TENDENCIES TO OVER ANALYZE AND OVER INTERPRET ONE'S WORKS. "ASKING AN AUTHOR FOR AN INTERPRETATION OF HIS BOOKS IS LIKE ASKING A CHICKEN WHAT CHEMICALS IT USED WHEN IT LAID AN EGG," SAYS THE 74-YEAR OLD WRITER. SINGER ALSO INSISTS THAT THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE IS TO ENTERTAIN AND NOT TO TEACH, EXPLAIN OR CHANGE SOCIETY. "IF I CAN ENTERTAIN A READER FOR HALF AN HOUR, THAT IS ENOUGH FOR ME," HE SAYS:

TAPE: CUT THREE -- SINGER

"I THINK LITERATURE IS STORYTELLING. IN OTHER WORDS, THE MOMENT A WRITER SITS DOWN TO WRITE WITHOUT THE IDEA OF TELLING A STORY, BUT TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD, HE HAS ALREADY LOST THE STORY AND HAS LOST THE READER."

VOICE:

MANY BELIEVE THAT ISAAC BESHEVIS SINGER IS PERHAPS THE GREATEST YIDDISH WRITER OF ALL TIME. SOME HAVE CALLED HIM "THE GREATEST WRITER IN THE WORLD TODAY". AND IT WAS THE CELEBRATED AMERICAN LITERARY CRITIC, EDMUND WILSON, WHO FIRST RECOMMENDED HIM FOR THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE.

WHAT GIVES HIS STORIES THEIR UNDOUBTED STRENGTH -- A REVIEWER ONCE OBSERVED -- IS A QUALITY COMMON TO ALL FOLK LITERATURE: AN EXACT LITERALNESS ABOUT THE VISIBLE WITH AN UNQUESTIONED ACCEPTANCE OF THE INVISIBLE.

OF HIS TWELVE NOVELS, SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS ARE "THE FAMILY MOSKAT", "THE MANOR" AND "THE ESTATE". OF HIS COUNTLESS STORIES "THE MAGICIAN OF LUBLIN", "IN MY FATHER'S COURT" AND "A CROWN OF FEATHERS" ARE VERY WELL KNOWN. BUT FOR THE INITIATED, "GIMPEL THE FOOL", HIS FIRST SHORT STORY PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH IS THE QUINTESSENTIAL SINGER. IT IS THE STORY OF A SIMPLE VILLAGER WHO IS DECIEVED INTO MARRYING THE TOWN SLUT. DESPITE ALL THE HUMILIATIONS HE GOES THROUGH ALL HIS

LIFE, HE STILL BELIEVES IN THE BEAUTY OF THIS AND THE OTHER WORLD. AND IN HIS OLD AGE, GIMPEL, LIKE SINGER, BECOMES A TRUE PHILOSOPHER. TO GIVE YOU AN EXAMPLE OF THE WRITER'S INIMITABLE STYLE, HERE IS ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, IN A PASSAGE FROM HIS RECORDED READING OF "GIMPEL THE FOOL"

TAPE: CUT FOUR -- SINGER

"I WONDERED OVER THIS LAND AND GOOD PEOPLE DID NOT NEGLECT ME. AFTER MANY YEARS I BECAME OLD AND WHITE. I HEARD A GREAT DEAL MANY LIES AND FALSEHOODS. BUT THE LONGER I LIVED, THE MORE I UNDERSTOOD THAT THEY WERE REALLY NO LIES. WHATEVER DOES REALLY HAPPEN IS DREAMT AT NIGHT. IT HAPPENS TO ONE IF IT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO ANOTHER, TOMORROW IF NOT TODAY. OR A CENTURY HENCE IF NOT THE NEXT DAY...GOING FROM PLACE TO PLACE, EATING AT STRANGE TABLES, IT OFTEN HAPPENS THAT I SPIN YARNS, IMPROBABLE THINGS THAT COULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED ABOUT DEVILS, MAGICIANS, WINDMILLS AND THE LIKE. THE CHILDREN RUN AFTER ME CALLING: 'GRANDFATHER TELL US A STORY.' SOMETIME THEY ASK FOR PARTICULAR STORIES AND I TRY TO PLEASE THEM. A FAT YOUNG BOY ONCE SAID TO ME: 'GRAND FATHER, IT'S THE SAME STORY YOU TOLD US BEFORE.' THE LITTLE ROGUE. HE WAS RIGHT."

VOICE:

NOW, OF COURSE, ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, IS NOT JUST ANY ORDINARY STORY-TELLER. HE HAS BEEN SINGLED OUT BY THE SWEDISH ACADEMY OF LETTERS FOR THIS YEAR'S NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE. SINGER, TYPICALLY, REFUSED TO BELIEVE IT AT FIRST, BUT LATER HE COULD NOT DENY THAT HE WAS THIS YEAR'S CHOICE IN STOCKHOLM. AND HOW WILL HE RECEIVE SUCH AN HONOR?

TAPE: CUT FIVE -- SINGER

"IT WILL BE JUST LIKE ANYTHING ELSE. WITH GOD'S HELP I WILL GO THERE AND THEY WILL GIVE IT TO ME AND I WILL SAY 'THANK YOU' OR I WILL MAKE A LITTLE SPEECH. WHAT CAN I DO? IT'S NOT GOING TO SHAKE THE PILLARS OF THE UNIVERSE."

VOICE:

ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE.